



Monological Drama to reshape the Northern Irish Identity: 'A Night in November' by Marie Jones

Virginie Privas-Bréauté

► To cite this version:

Virginie Privas-Bréauté. Monological Drama to reshape the Northern Irish Identity: 'A Night in November' by Marie Jones. *Estudios Irlandeses Journal of Irish Studies*, 2010, 5, pp.68-80. halshs-00840071

HAL Id: halshs-00840071

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00840071>

Submitted on 1 Jul 2013

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Monological Drama to Reshape the Northern Irish Identity: *A Night in November* by Marie Jones

Virginie Privas
Université Jean Moulin □Lyon 3

Copyright (c) 2010 by Virginie Privas. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged for access.

Abstract. In this contemporary one-man theatre play, Marie Jones's character, Kenneth McCallister, is prompted to break free from the prejudices in and against Northern Ireland. Indeed, the playwright aims at finding new ways to deconstruct the preconceived idea that there are two different identities in Northern Ireland closely linked to the division between two religious communities. Instead, she seeks connections, even with the Irish who migrated (the diasporic dimension, though, is not to be discussed within this paper). The author explores this possibility through the psychological evolution of a Northern Irish Protestant who comes to lack references in terms of identity. On stage, he recalls the events that launched him on a quest to redefine his identity, an identity in which his religious denomination is taken into account but is not the only community marker. Marie Jones eventually offers an insight into what being and feeling Irish means for someone who has always lived as a Protestant in Northern Ireland. Monologue and the notion of "frontiers" (be they social, political, geographical, historical or theatrical) that emerge only to be destroyed, are some of the theatrical devices she resorts to in order to voice her aim in this experimental play which ultimately proposes to reshape the contours of Northern Irish drama about the Troubles.

Key Words. Brecht, conflict, frontier, identity, loyalism, monologue, post-colonialism, post-modernism, Protestantism, sectarianism

Resumen. En esta pieza de teatro contemporánea para un actor de Marie Jones, el personaje Kenneth McCallister se apresta a romper con los prejuicios existentes en y hacia Irlanda del Norte. De esta manera la dramaturga busca nuevas maneras de deconstruir la idea preconcebida de que en Irlanda del Norte hay dos identidades distintas de acuerdo con las dos comunidades religiosas. Por el contrario, ella busca puntos de conexión, incluso con irlandeses emigrados (en este artículo, no obstante, no se aborda la dimensión diaspórica). La autora examina dicha posibilidad a través de la evolución psicológica de un protestante norirlandés a quien le faltan referencias identitarias. En escena rememora acontecimientos que le llevaron a redefinir su identidad, una identidad en la que la religión cuenta pero no es el único factor determinante. Marie Jones explora lo que significa ser y sentirse irlandés para alguien que ha vivido siempre como protestante en Irlanda del Norte. El monólogo y la idea de "fronteras" (sociales, políticas, geográficas, históricas o teatrales) que surgen para ser destruidas, son algunos de los recursos teatrales que utiliza en esa obra experimental que insufla nuevo vigor al teatro entorno al conflicto norirlandés.

Palabras clave: Brecht, conflicto, frontera, identidad, lealismo, monólogo, post-colonialismo, post-modernismo, protestantismo, sectarianismo

First produced in August 1994 by DubbelJoint at the Belfast Institute of Further Education, *A Night in November* by Marie Jones (1951-) highlights a man's personal psychological identity quest. It stages a unique single character, Kenneth McCallister, who recalls the reasons why a football match he attended in November 1993 prompted him to take some distance from his Northern Irish Protestant background and environment. More than a spectator at a match between Northern Ireland and the Republic, McCallister plays witness to a demonstration of the sectarian hatred that has plagued Northern Ireland for countless years. In her piece, Marie Jones frames the Northern Irish peace process from a loyalist/unionist perspective. This was for her a particularly apt time to stage such a play since at the time of the performance the Provisional IRA had just declared a cease-fire.

A Belfast-born Protestant herself, Jones first worked as an actress before co-founding the Charabanc Theatre Company in 1983 and DubbelJoint Productions with Pam Brighton in 1991. She began her career as a playwright by writing for Charabanc, but it was not until 1999 that she gained recognition with *Stones in his Pockets*. The activities of the two theatre companies in which she worked reach beyond what she was taught. According to Tom Maguire in *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland. Through and Beyond the Troubles*,

While Charabanc's work [had been] characterised by its commitment to touring across political and sectarian boundaries [] DubbelJoint was soon to be primarily identified with the nationalist communities close to its home base in West Belfast (Maguire, 2006: 19).

If Charabanc's political commitment was qualified to be 'neutral' by Pam Brighton and 'left energy for documentary or community drama which concentrated on survival and therefore accentuated hope' (Murray 1997: 195), DubbelJoint's involvement was more obvious. Its creation was meant 'to counter the sense that, as far as theatre [was] concerned, it seem[ed] that half the population in the north of Ireland was being ignored [] its experiences, its opinions, its life and its culture were being simply overlooked' (Carruthers et al. 2003: 51). That is why, in the plays she wrote for DubbelJoint in particular, Marie Jones gives a new light onto Irishness. To pursue her aim, she seems to seek to illustrate the events that

have affected her as she confesses in an interview with former Artistic and Managing director of Andrew Lane's theatre in Dublin, Pat Moylan:

Pat Moylan: *To what extent have Northern politics influenced your writing?*

Marie Jones: *A Night in November* deals with the political situation head on but sometimes you are influenced by more personal political situations that affect you [] growing up and living in Belfast has to colour your work (Chambers et al. 2001: 217).

Through *A Night in November* in particular, the playwright seems to map on her personal change the experience of Kenneth McCallister who aims at redefining his Northern Irish identity. To reach this objective, McCallister seeks to first break down the prejudices he holds towards Catholics and then to deconstruct his British Northern Irish identity. In an effort to do so, he leaves Northern Ireland on a journey to discover who he is. However, the physical distance only leads him to align himself even more closely with the Irish nationalist community as shall be studied.

In an article entitled 'Kicking with both Feet', Marie Jones's *A Night in November* Eamonn Jordan says that this play 'finds parallel, transformative, and transitional spaces within which to assess and test novel ideas' (Jordan 2008: 51). He goes on saying that Jones's body of work is 'markedly animated by the notion of play and the subversions that play facilitates' (Jordan 2008: 51). The originality of Jones's approach relies on her reflection on theatricality to demonstrate that nothing is stable; everything is in constant evolution. Monologue is a device she uses to facilitate the character's awareness and transformation, but also to establish a privileged link with the audience, entrusting them with his most profound thoughts. Jones problematises the construction of the self through monologue. She has chosen this theatrical device to enable her character to get free from a particularly challenging social, economic and political environment.

A Night in November represents the power of drama in which the private and the public spheres overlap. McCallister exemplifies the aim of drama to publicize the private by expressing his deep personal thoughts as well as his relatives'. From this, the audience thus sees into his secret Protestant middle-class life

and probably linked mid-life crisis, becoming his trustee or even, at times, his psycho analyst. In this minimalist play, the setting and props are almost completely absent, thus heightening the emphasis on the relationship between the actor and audience. Without external aids, relying only on his body and his gestures to support his speech, Kenneth shares with the public his profound desire to break free from the Northern Irish ancestral opposition, a decision which was triggered off by his attending the football match opposing the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland teams. In Kenneth's memory the supporters of Northern Ireland's team, mainly Protestant loyalists, are depicted as pure savages, while the Republic's fans, qualified to be Catholic nationalist and Irish, watch the game quietly, peacefully. Kenneth remembers asking Ernie, his father-in-law who took him there: 'Is this a football match Ernie, or a crowd of lions waiting for the Christians' what's going on here.' (Jones 2006: 70). Ernie's answer is even more frightening since, despising the Irish Catholics and praising the Northern Irish Protestants, he overtly supports violence:

They've got blood in their nostrils Kenny, Fenian blood, worse than that foreign Fenian blood and what's even more despicable than that, mercenary Fenian blood' here they come, here's our boys' (*Chants*). Northern Ireland Northern Ireland, come on lads, show them Papish bastards how to play football' luk, luk' there's billy' (*Shouts*). []

Luk at them, luk at them dirty Fenian scum' BOO!

(*Ernie Sings*.) God save our gracious Queen etc. etc. (Jones 2006: 70).

As far as Kenneth remembers, Ernie adds 'it makes you proud to be British when you hear that' (Jones 2006: 70), a sentence in which the pronoun 'that' obviously refers to the chants but also the aggressiveness of the Northern Irish supporters. It is on this occasion that the division between the Northern Irish who feel British deep inside them and those who feel Irish and side with the Southerners is made clear. However, Kenneth, a Protestant from Northern Ireland, does not agree with his father-in-law; rather, he feels ashamed, disgusted, to be among the supporters of Northern Ireland (in this case, the Protestants). On the contrary, he starts to share

some compassion for the Catholics, who silently watch the game. This match thus becomes a metaphor for the rift between his Protestant private sphere and his Northern Irish background.

At the play's beginning – and before that particular night in November – Kenneth is a Protestant dole clerk¹ under the potential threat of Catholic Republicans like any other Protestant. He informs the audience that, 'the day started out like every other day starts out' check under the car for explosive devices' you have to be a step ahead of them bastards' they keep advancing their technology' (63). Like the members of the community he is part of, he is prejudiced. He admits he has always thought that Northern Ireland was not an integral part of the entire isle of Ireland. In a conversation with a jobless Catholic man to whom he asks to come back the following day, he recalls:

Here now but I have to come back tomorrow, don't I?

Aye, but I won't be here' I have to go to Dublin.

(*Writes*.) Not available for work as out of the country.

What' I'm only going to Dublin for the morning.

You're out of the country (66).

For this Catholic jobless man, Ireland is not a foreign country; he rather infers that Northern Ireland is part of the whole isle while for Kenneth Northern Ireland belongs to another territory, the United Kingdom. However, later in the day, as Kenneth drives his father-in-law to Windsor Park to attend the football match between Northern Ireland and Ireland, he hears Ernie shout to the Republic's supporters 'go away back to your own country' (69). He is highly shocked by this remark and reminds his father-in-law that 'they are up to see the match' support their team' (69). But, after hearing his father-in-law and the members of his community looking down upon the visitors, he qualifies the songs they sing and which he grew up with as 'despicable' (73) since they do not only encourage their team but also humiliate the

1. This might be a clue for his being close to the Catholic Irish, depicted as unemployed.

players and the fans of the other team. McCallister does not feel alike. But at the same time, he is aware that the Catholic Northern Irish, especially Jerry, his Catholic boss,² see him as belonging to that community. Unable to bear this idea any longer, he finally chooses to try and step out of this circle; in other words, he makes up his mind not to side with sectarianism any longer. Whereas he had never realised how prejudiced he also was, he suddenly starts demonstrating his sympathy for the Catholic Northern Irish and Irish. He goes as far as helping a Northern Irish supporter of the Irish team sing the British anthem in secret so as not to be noticed by the "lions". This new vision on the situation nonetheless places him at the centre of a conflict putting his own identity into question all of a sudden. Throughout the play, he explains to the audience the stages of his transformation. The time and consideration devoted to deciding how to act, or even react, is represented through various pauses and breaks, themselves encoded in the text by the numerous suspension marks. Kenneth's quest eventually comes to an end after a three-step journey rendered explicit in his monological speech. Witnessing hatred from the Protestants at this football match on this particular night leads the protagonist to take a first step, creating distance from the preconceived ideas on the Catholics living in Northern Ireland.

The protagonist realises that he has never known what it feels like to live as a Catholic in Belfast. He has only known what he has been told since he was born. Thus, to confirm or invalidate the representations that were created for him, he is enticed to enter the Catholic sphere. Jones punctuates her play with allusions to Catholic stereotypes to give light to the prejudices held against the Catholics. According to Eamonn Jordan, "[she] filters critically through her work many of the ideological biases, and crass class and sectarian assumptions upon which prejudices are built" (Jordan 2008: 51). For example, Kenneth has an appointment with a Catholic man who tells

him that he has six children and that he is without a job (65, 77). Furthermore, at the football match, Ernie overtly associates the Irish football players with the IRA. In Kenneth's mouth, Ernie says:

[] well let me tell you they may luk like mere innocent football players but as far as I am concerned they are representing the IRA get it the Irish Republican Army, understand, Republic of Ireland, same thing (71).

Jones's text is punctuated by references to the painful history of Northern Ireland which led to the division of and the tensions between the two communities. Kenneth becomes aware he cannot stand this bigotry any longer. Curiosity, and also a profound desire to discover what a Catholic's life really is, prompts him to see the environment of a Catholic, and in this case, Jerry, his boss. After work, he accompanies Jerry to the Falls Road, the Catholic nationalist area of Belfast where his boss lives; therefore, he intrudes a secret space, a place supposed to be forbidden and dangerous for Protestants. Surprisingly, he describes this "lift" as a bright journey to an unknown country where nobody pays attention to him, to whom he is, to his religious affiliation:

I drove up the Falls road with Jerry, I had never been on the Falls Road in my life, never the sun was shining, the road was hiving with black cabs and women and children and army tanks and normality and I was nervous, like a stranger to a foreign country, not sure of the territory, feeling like they were all looking at me, knowing I was a stranger, knowing I was the enemy, but no one paid a blind bit of notice, I fitted into the normality just like the soldiers (82).

What he sees there differs from what he has always been told. While he admits that he grew up with "pictures of deprivation and filth and graffiti and too many kids and not enough soap" (82-83), he discovers that Jerry's environment is different from what he was led to imagine. His house, first, is bigger. It is detached. Once inside, Kenneth is even more astonished to discover that Jerry owns books he has really read while he, Kenneth, has never had the chance to buy a book he wanted to read. In fact, he laments that his wife buys classics she can display on the shelves and forbids him to buy any other books. He ends up realising that he lives for the sake of

2. On that occasion, Jones tries to re-establish a balance in terms of positions since it has commonly been said that only Protestants had top jobs in Northern Ireland. She also suggests the new decisions from the government to take on as many Catholics as Protestants in civil services.

appearances while Jerry's life is closer to reality. In addition, he is utterly shocked by his wife's leaving him on his own from time to time. He recalls the conversation:

Wife not here, Jerry.

No, she's left a note on the kitchen table, she took a notion to take the kids to the pictures, so I'm to get on my own (83).

And he directly addresses the spectator to draw his own conclusion and say how lucky Jerry is:

Oh, God, what freedom, what wonderful unpredictability and then at the bottom of the note which I strained my eyes to see, what Jerry never bothered to read out Love you (83).

Kenneth finally concludes that his Catholic boss's life is definitely better worth living than his; to quote Tom Maguire, '[he] contrasts it with the values underpinning his own home and upbringing' (Maguire 2006: 142), and realizes he is envious of his boss's freedom.

That is why, after this night in November, Kenneth acknowledges the sufferings that the Northern Irish Catholics must have undergone over the years. After receiving for the second time the jobless Catholic he had not taken seriously the day before that match, he admits:

I looked into his eyes and I saw the years of acceptance of people like me treating him like dirt years of accepting that he had to put up with my pathetic bigotry years of knowing that he was a Catholic, an out-of-work Catholic that he must accept being treated like he was nothing, of no worth and I looked into his eyes and I had to get up and walk away he was right (76).

His perception changes radically when he discusses with Jerry who supported the team of the Republic on that night in November and who confides to him that even if the Republic qualified, it was a pity to witness that Protestant fit of anger and meanness. Kenneth recalls the conversation in the following words:

We all expected that, Kenneth, we were prepared for that.

Were you, Jerry?

Oh aye.

Were you scared, Jerry?

Well, I wasn't exactly laid back about it, but as I say, we expected it terrible pity, like, because it spoiled it for the players, they couldn't

perform so it spoils it for everybody pity awful shame (78).

Kenneth shares his opinion, though he finds himself utterly surprised by the fact that Catholics may pity Protestants. He had never thought about it, just as much as he would never have believed he could envy a Catholic some day. He finally admits that Jerry was right (77), a difficult confession for a Northern Irish Protestant supposed to hate, or at best ignore, the Northern Irish Catholics. This psychological transformation sharply contrasts with the events at the beginning of the play when Kenneth boasted about becoming a member of the Belfast golf club. At that time he could not wait to tell this to Jerry who will never be able to be a member of this prestigious club (67) precisely because of his religious background. But after attending the football match, after going to Jerry's house, Kenneth's opinion is absolutely not the same. From that moment onwards, Kenneth feels 'something happening' to him (77). It started at the football match during which he said 'I felt sick' (71) and it continues with his assertion that his 'head was spinning' (76). Like the character's public and private overlapping spheres, the Catholic and Protestant circles suddenly collide and Marie Jones, through McCallister's monologue, faces the audience with an overlapping of the four circles (private/public and Protestant/Catholic) in which Kenneth now stands centre. As the public and private spheres are absorbed by one another on the stage, the religious circles are also intertwined: the Protestant circle is progressively absorbing the Catholic one.³ Yet, Protestantism and Catholicism replace social circles here since, in a Northern Irish context, they are notions which imply much more than only religious affiliations. They are identity markers as John Whyte explains in *Interpreting Northern Ireland*:

3. Absorption, a term borrowed from Mark Phelan, seems more accurate than integration as argued/demonstrated in this text. (Mark Phelan in Jordan: 'Jones's plays are based on the politics of absorption rather than inclusion, of negation rather than negotiation' 56-57).

In most parts of the world [the adjectives 'Protestant' and 'Catholic'] mark a purely religious difference, between two kinds of Christians. But in Northern Ireland, where religion is so closely linked to other differences, the terms have wider associations. As a psychologist, EE O'Donnell, has put it (*Northern Irish Stereotypes*, Dublin: college of industrial relations, 1977, 5), in Northern Ireland these terms 'involve a combination of historic, national, tribal, social, economic and other differences, all subsumed under the heading of religious allegiance' (Whyte 1990: 105).

McCallister's remembering all the conversations he had as well as his inner reflections turned into loud confessions to the public – who take the role of psycho therapist at that stage – lead him to realize how he has progressively come to lack landmarks in term of identity.

The play indeed problematises the transformation of the character putting emphasis on the moments before and after that match, and relying on parallels, paradoxes, oppositions and dichotomies. Marie Jones articulates the problem of belonging to a group with that of feeling different from the community we are supposed to belong to. She, thus, urges her character to get rid of these elements, to deconstruct his Northern Irish Loyalist Unionist Protestant identity so as to start again on a better basis. This deconstruction constitutes the second phase of his journey towards a redefinition of his identity.

In the play, loyalism, unionism and Protestantism are the elements forging the British identity of the majority of the inhabitants in Northern Ireland. They are usually opposed to republicanism, nationalism and Catholicism, the components of an 'Irish' individual's identity. Jones does not omit this traditional division between 'them and us' (68) in her play; from Kenneth's perspective, 'them' naturally stands for the Catholics and 'us' refers to the Protestants, a community to which the protagonist belongs at the start of the play. As the story unfolds, the audience gets the impression that Kenneth drifts further and further away from the community in which he was born. Before he makes any firm decision, he returns to the area where he grew up, east Belfast, where most Protestants live. The way Kenneth narrates this episode sharply contrasts with the episode of his lift to Jerry's house, on

the Falls road. There, he meets the son of an old friend, Norman Dawson, a dead paramilitary, who comes and sees him to check who he is and to get some money:

Are you lookin for touts or somethin'?

[] The kid had wheeled his bicycle right up to the driver's window and was leaning it and himself on the car and poking his wee face in at mine.

No, I'm not the Branch – I used to live in this street – N° 34.

– Do you live here?

Aye – over there – my da was born in this street too, you know, and so was his Ma.

What's your Da's name?

He's dead.

Sorry son.

My Da is a hero, he got killed trying to blow up a Fenian pub – see, when I'm his age I won't get killed – I'm not gonna miss, so I'm not.

What was your Da's name?

Norman Dawson – his photo's up on the wall of the club – he's dead famous – have ye any money on ye mister? (84).

Kenneth realises that he has been lucky enough to escape this fate, and in turn that he should now make the most of his life. Moreover, the atmosphere pervading the Protestant area is not welcoming to him any longer; unlike the pleasant atmosphere on the Falls road as exemplified by the choice of his words when he describes his trip to the Catholic area. However, as long as he is surrounded by his wife, his relatives and his in-laws, he remains part of this circle. Worse, he gets the impression he is imprisoned in a triangular conflict in which he is opposed to his loyalist father-in-law and his Unionist wife and relatives.⁴ Therefore, he feels it important for his own sake to distance himself from that triangle. He sets before the public's eyes who his relatives are by impersonating them in turn. Nevertheless, the audience must remain aware that in this mono-dramatic piece of work, they, according to Maguire, are 'entirely reliant on the performer to organize their perspective on the scenes enacted; to direct it to where it should attend' (Maguire 2006: 144). As Kenneth embodies *deixis*, he manipulates 'the focus to represent the attention given to other participants in the conversation or elements in

4. Echoing the triangle making up the British Northern Irish identity (i.e. loyalism, unionism and Protestantism) and in which Kenneth will embody the Protestant element.

the dramatic world (Maguire 2006: 143). It is indeed true that the audience can only see Kenneth's viewpoint as he certainly adopts a selective and subjective perception of the real world and conveys a biased opinion from the beginning. Because the story is related retrospectively, Kenneth thus filters all the points of views of the Protestants and Catholics who surround him after centralising them. On the stage, he re-enacts the various situations he had with them, which can be assimilated to meta-theatre from a post-colonial viewpoint. Giving the viewpoints of the various people represented is, according to Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins in *Post-colonial Drama*, a means for the protagonist and the author to provide the spectators with a myriad of viewing frames through which to reinterpret the site of colonial authority (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 253). Therefore, the audience is not manipulated, it is rather provoked and led to react as we shall study.

Kenneth impersonates his father-in-law, Ernie, as if he was the representative of the loyalist community. Through his bigotry and negative behaviour towards the Republic's supporters at the football match, Kenneth depicts him as a person fuelled with hatred (75). For this reason, he is ashamed to be his son-in-law. Ernie's role is then taken on by relatives of Kenneth's, Pauline and Stewart, who embody the political party they support, unionism, which is another element building the British identity of Northern Irish Protestants. Pauline and Stewart assert that the Unionist politicians they support will hopefully never allow for the Downing Street declaration to be implemented (91) even if this agreement was meant to reunify both communities in Ulster. For that precise reason, Kenneth makes it clear that he wants to distance himself from them, and says that he does not want to turn the radio on because he objects to listening to the politicians [he had voted] for in this case, the unionists (81). Among his relatives stands his wife, Debrah, who is described negatively from the beginning of the play. For example, as she approaches Kenneth while he is checking for bombs under his car, her feet are described as 'two rottweilers' (63). She embodies the middle-class Protestant housewife, proud to be socially above the condition of her Catholic counterparts. She is delighted that her husband

has been accepted at the golf club. For this reason, Kenneth mocks her. His representation of her on stage is described as follows by Eamonn Jordan:

[] Debrah is the stereotype of the nagging, cold and henpecking partner. In Kenneth's imitation for his wife, the mimicry is often performed as a heightened, exaggerated, falsetto berating of him by her (Jordan 2008: 54).

The details on his performance on stage give light to Kenneth's absence of respect for her. Undoubtedly, because his masculinity is also challenged,⁵ he takes his revenge through this dramatic monologue which particularly allows him to ridicule her. As the play unfolds, McCallister remembers how he has grown aware of his hatred for her, precisely because of her denial of the Catholics. He further confesses to the audience that he does not love her anymore, and rather that she has become a habit (79). But he does not say this to her there is always a discrepancy between what he thinks and what he really says to the people concerned as the audience notices. Yet, he promises to try to save his marriage, proposing to his wife to leave the house and the children for a while to go to a restaurant, just as Jerry and his wife would do. But Debrah refuses and he hates her more for rejecting his aspiration for some freedom. She finds three reasons not to leave the house, which the protagonist analyses in these terms:

I hate it, I hate it, when she does her ABCs, nothing is a yes or a no or a maybe, everything has to have an A and a B and a C, never just an A or even an A and a B always three always, always (79).

5. For an interpretation and explanation of challenged masculinities in monological Irish plays, read Brian Singleton's article, 'Am I talking to Myself? Men, Masculinities and the Monologue in Contemporary Irish Drama' in Clare Wallace (ed.), *Monologues*. For Singleton, monologues particularly stage '[men that] live on the margins of society and are ruled by prejudices and fears, primarily of their own masculine status and its perception by others' (2006: 263). He goes on saying 'the new Irish male monologues feature a rogue male caught between historic representations of other rogue males' (263).

These three reasons echo the three angles of the triangle in which he feels imprisoned and enhance the dramatic tension, emphasizing the feeling of imprisonment of the character. Finally, when he tells Debrah with admiration that when he was at his boss's, his detached big house was in a mess since his wife had gone to the cinema with their children, she replies, "Is it any wonder they don't deserve anything?" (87). Debrah obviously sticks to sectarianism and stereotypes. This comment only adds to the tension between him and his wife, and he feels it urgent to leave his life behind as he explains:

From this moment on, I knew I had to stop, stop before it was too late, stop before I destroyed my wife and our put-upable little life. No, to look back now could only mean total disaster—so Kenneth McCallister vowed that night that he would never look back again (81).

Kenneth definitely decides it is high time his living conditions changed. Confessing this to the public helps him make a decision. By going over all these episodes, Kenneth realizes that he does not know who he really is. He feels he has been stolen his identity. At that stage, he understands that he wants it back. That is why he will undertake to look for what is missing. As the audience might expect Kenneth to take some measures, they are also unsure that he will act, precisely because of the gap they have witnessed so far between his thoughts and his actions. The solution Kenneth finds in the second - and last - act is to secretly escape, as he relates. Like the goal scored by the Republic's team in Belfast which enables the football players to qualify and compete in America, Kenneth seizes this occasion and goes to New York City to support the team. He uses the money for the golf club membership to fly to The United States of America, which lulls him into a state of liberty. In passing, Jones refers to both the American dream, a concept seemingly still alive in Northern Ireland, and also to the migration of the Irish in the 19th century, since there Kenneth meets many Irish New Yorkers stemming from the Diaspora.

This physical departure constitutes the third and last step of his quest to redefine his identity: McCallister must reconstruct a sense of self. It is in America that the protagonist completes his transformation. Surprisingly, he chooses to keep some components and change others.

By leaving Northern Ireland, Kenneth not only abandons his wife and children, his relatives, his Protestant background and sectarianism, but he also leaves a part of his identity. This departure thus enables him to create some distance from himself. Allusions to this decision to take some distance from his Britishness are first made clear when he refers to himself as "Kenneth Norman McCallister" instead of simply saying "I". He then remembers that as he is driving down to Dublin airport, he never looks behind him. Without having to explicitly state that he does not want to return to the north, the audience understands that he is so delighted to arrive to a place where joy pervades that he does not even think about returning neither to Belfast nor to his past. He relates his excitement as follows:

I crossed the border for the first time in my life.
[]

Dublin airport 10 kilometers, yes []

I drove into the car park—it was a sight I'll never forget—the whole airport had been taken over by a green, white and gold army—there were check-ins going on in the car park—people were singing—at nine o'clock in the morning, they were singing and laughing and chanting "Olé, we're on our way, we're on our way to the USA" (96).

This excitement is conveyed through the numerous short sentences giving a rapid rhythm to the flow of speech—corroborates a haste to find freedom. If we adopt a post-colonial perspective on the situation, we may say that McCallister "refuses the closures of imperial cartography" (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996:147). As a matter of fact, as he crosses the frontier for the first time, he acknowledges all of a sudden that all the prejudices with which he grew up are only based on fear:

I crossed the border for the first time in my life. It just never occurred to me to do it, we were taught to be afraid, to be afraid of the black magic, the dark evil, the mysterious jiggery Popery that will brainwash us. But is that what it is? Is that what our leaders are really scared of, or is it that if the tables are turned they are afraid that we'll be treated the way they've treated the Taigs and we'll be second-class citizens (97).

For Maguire indeed "the play confirms loyalist fears of republican aspirations for an all-Ireland state" (Maguire, 2006: 154). Yet,

crossing the border leads Kenneth to break these prejudices down and elicit this fear is not justified.

Once he is in New York City, McCallister obviously finds what he has been looking for: he feels free because he owns no ticket to go and see the match, and since nothing was planned, he has nowhere to stay (99). He also feels free to support Ireland's football team; he is not ashamed any more. The audience is made to understand how excited he is not to feel imprisoned by his environment anymore; on the contrary, he confesses "as I walked across the tarmac, my feet were not even touching the ground" (100).

The conventions of drama, and more particularly monologue, allow Jones to convey that notion of freedom. Monologue, as providing "structural freedom" to quote David Bradby in *Monologues* (Wallace 2006: 64), enables him to distance himself from this environment. First, his speech is not linear, it is fragmented, a style which mirrors the deconstruction of the protagonist's identity but which also provides evidence for his "refusal of closure" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 144). He narrates what happened to him retrospectively, through various episodes, and it comes to the spectator who follows the story from one end to another to replace it in its context, in its chronology. In relating the various episodes that occurred to him, there are neither introductions nor conclusions, as if the shift from one story to another was natural, without any obstacle. This device compels the audience to pay particular attention to what the protagonist thus chooses to explain. David Bradby also remarks that "the voice and body of the actor are essential to this writing, both to give physical presence to the 'textuality' identified by Pavis, and to permit the gradual emergence of the self" (Wallace 2006: 65). To corroborate his thoughts, from the beginning of the play onwards, Kenneth tries to have some control over space; he thus asserts his freedom, he is empowered, through his movements and his occupation of all the stage space. As Jones indicates:

The actor moves around the stage creating the environment and plays all the characters without the aid of other props or additional scenery. The actor creates sound effects when necessary (63).

The protagonist's attitude and decision to leave

Northern Ireland bring to the fore a post-colonial approach on the author's part since, "the post-colonial body disrupts the constrained space and signification left to it by the colonizers and becomes a site for resistant inscription" (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 204). Monologue, putting emphasis on the audience's role as his only direct addressee, creates a sense of intimacy and closeness and favors the public's understanding of this resistance. This technique is not without recalling the abolition of the fourth wall in epic drama.

Then, the protagonist, standing alone on the stage, speaks for all the characters that surround him. There is no frontier between his speech, the speeches of the persons he had conversations with and his inner reflections. They all make up only one flowing text delivered to the audience. On stage yet, it requires high flexibility and energy from the performer who needs to change voices, positions, behaviours, to indicate the shift from one character to another. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins explain that "plays which use one actor to embody multiple characters usually aim for fluid action and role changes in order to emphasise the performativity of the body" (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 234). Through this dramatic technique, the spectator is enticed to pay careful attention to the protagonist's evolution. As a contrast to his own community which is not welcoming anymore, Jones puts emphasis on McCallister's experiencing the warm welcome of the Irish (91); more than that, he feels included among the other Irish fans, he is "one of the lads" (100). The author even draws the audience's attention onto another parallel: as he had helped a Catholic supporter of the team of Northern Ireland sing the British anthem that night in November, he is helped by Irish fans sing the Irish anthem in New York City. Indeed, so that Kenneth breaks down the prejudices held against Catholics and gets away from his unionist/loyalist environment, leaves Belfast behind, to be free and whole, he is progressively encouraged to align himself with the nationalist Irish community. As the play draws to an end, Kenneth does not include himself among the people who mistreated the Catholics since, while he was among "us" previously, he subsequently refers to his community as "they" Kenneth now definitely feels different from the members of his tribe,

from 'them' and states 'these are not the people I am part of' (72). He even adds, 'they don't speak for me' (77-78).

Nevertheless, the encounter of another Protestant from Belfast supporting the Republic's team in New York convinces him that he can keep his religious beliefs and denomination, which he has not put under scrutiny so far. If he was firstly uncertain that one could remain Protestant and feel Irish, he is finally made sure that his choice was the best when, recalling his dialogue with this man he affectionately calls 'mate', he becomes the lucky man. He tells him he was at the match in November but the man's reaction is not that he expected:

Were you at that match in Windsor Park?

I was.

[] I didn't go ' me ' I was a coward ' but I have to hand it to you ' here, take a slug of that whiskey, because youse deserve a medal and Jackie's army are proud of yis ' .(Sings.) We're all part of Jackie's Army '

No you wouldn't have been proud of me, you see, I am a Protestant.

So am I.

Jesus, so he was ' . So he was and yet he said ' God ' you lucky bugger ' so he was and yet ' ah, what the hell ' (101).

He is now proud to be a Protestant, part of the supporters of the team of Coach Jack Charlton. He is ultimately able to claim 'I am an Irish man from Belfast.' (107). By the end of the play, Kenneth has reached his goal. He repeats to this new friend, 'I absolve myself ' I am free of them Mick, I am free of it. I am a free man, I am a Protestant man, I am an Irish man.' (108). The sentence structure conveys that the final choice of the protagonist is finally reached after a long process; it is divisive but utterly rewarding. We may agree with Maguire who, quoting John Wilson Foster, 'suggested of *ANN* that the play demonstrates an Ulster Protestant self-distaste whose indirect expression 'might be the embrace of Irish culture at the expense of the lesser Ulster culture' (Maguire, 2006: 153).

This character can undoubtedly be considered as an allegory for Northern Ireland. The message delivered by Jones is definitely to look for means to reach the integrity and the wholeness of all the Irish, of Ireland, including the Province. And, as Marilynn Richtarik explains in *Acting between the Lines*, a book she wrote about the Northern Irish Theatre company Field Day, 'to speak of the 'integrity' (wholeness) of the island is clearly to come

from a nationalist perspective' (Richtarik 2001: 244). In fact, Tom Maguire asserts that 'Jones would be seen by many to have a close identification with a working-class nationalist community' (Maguire 2006: 140). To him, *A Night in November* is a 'public repudiation of the politics of [Jones's] background' full of 'implicit and explicit criticisms of the loyalist and unionist communities' behaviours in terms of class, gender and politics' (Maguire 2006: 139). Stewart Parker, another Northern Irish playwright, contemporary of Jones, adds to that, 'show[ing] the audience an image of wholeness, [playwrights] cease the task of picking over the entrails of the past, and begin to hint at a vision of the future' (Stewart Parker, 1986: 16). This confirms the idea that Marie Jones, through her personal evolution, this play and her character's transformation, not only believes in the future, but that she hopes for it and does not want to stick to the past any longer, even if it must not be forgotten. As a matter of fact, in *A Night in November*, the point does not rely on what the action is but in how it is told, in this case, it is linked to the Irish tradition of storytelling. In an interview given on the occasion of the premiere of her play *Rock Doves* (2007) Marie Jones explains that her family did not have real affiliations with the British Crown; on the contrary, she was brought up in an unusual way for a Northern Irish Protestant:

In the mid-50s, when we were kids, we didn't have television. I had 10 sisters and brothers, and we all lived very close together. Storytelling was very big in our family; it was ingrained in me before I knew it. I'd sit and listen to my mother and three aunts. I loved their stories (TDF Backstage).

Even though Maguire distinguishes drama from storytelling in 'the direct representation of the situation through action which brings the 'there and then' of the narrative into the 'here and now' of the moment of performance' (Maguire, 2006: 144) and the embodiment by the actor of *deixis*, mono-dramatic narrative devices like story-telling become a new way for the playwright to inform the audience how much she, as expressed through her character, can feel close to the nationalist Irish community. Through storytelling, she empowers Kenneth with history and the rewriting of history. As Helen Gilbert and

Joanne Tompkins explain in *Post-colonial Drama*,

A theatre praxis based on story-telling conventions foregrounds history not as a preordained and completed truth, but rather as a continually (re) constructed fiction which can only ever be partial (in both senses of the word), provisional, and subject to change (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 137).

Indeed, Jones articulates the past and the present so as to show the possibilities of transformation, how the past can influence the present and how all can be interpreted and rewritten to make the future brighter. Gilbert and Tompkins explain that 'the story-teller eschews naturalistic dialogue in favour of a direct address that generally historicises the action, calling for an intellectual response rather than merely an aesthetic appreciation' (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996:127). This post-colonial way of hinting at history corroborates the Brechtian thought that *historicisation* is a fundamental means of *distanciation* (Maier-Schaeffer 2003: 161).

Along those lines, Jones's play may undoubtedly be defined as post-colonial in so far as it aims to demythologize the Catholic Irish in Northern Ireland, to empower the protagonist through monologue, to rewrite history. It uses 'corporeality' as a 'highly positive, active strategy for staging resistance to imperialism' (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 230) and 'the post-colonial body as a vehicle for 'subverting and problematising the roles of identity, subjectivity, and corporeality that colonialism has assigned to the colonialisised subject' (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 253). In addition, *A Night in November* can be said to borrow Brechtian elements. Far from promoting naturalism, this play, being monological, points out the discrepancy between theatre and reality, one of Brechtian epic drama's objectives. As Patrice Pavis, quoted in Clare Wallace's introduction to *Monologues*, says 'the monologue reveals the artificiality of theatre and acting conventions' (Wallace 2006: 5). This play creates illusions so that the audience may realize they are watching a play. For instance, 'lighting and sound effects' to quote Margaret Llewellyn-Jones in *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity*, 'create scene change and atmosphere, though a three-level red white and blue rostra (Belfast) is changed to green white and orange when [Kenneth] reaches Dublin

airport' (Llewellyn-Jones 2002: 144). Then, Brecht's epic theatre 'concentrates on narrating action rather than allowing spectators to become immersed in events, and the form of epic plays does not rely on well-made plot-devices of conflict, tension and resolution 'linear action' but on montage, an assembled series of scenes each complete in itself' (Lennard & Luckhurst 2002: 102). Another aspect that Jones's play shares with Brecht's epic theatre resides in the idea of alienation through 'a tool-kit of distancing devices deployed to interrupt a spectator's process of identification with plot and characters, encoded in plays as strategies which seek to force a spectator to concentrate not on what the story is but on how it is told and what the consequences of an action may be' (Lennard & Luckhurst, 2002: 102). Kenneth's narration of the episodes of his life that helped him become aware of his condition, leading to his process of estrangement, prevents the spectators from identifying with him. On the contrary, his speech and his performance are meant to provoke the spectators, to open their eyes on the Northern Irish question. Furthermore, in epic theatre, 'Brecht's characters constantly refer to their social roles and to a social hierarchy' (Lennard & Luckhurst, 2002: 103). Similarly, Kenneth wants to break free from the society which paralyses him, forbids him to move forward. He often alludes to social roles, notably his membership at the golf club, his position as a dole clerk, and Jerry's professional superiority. He also feels challenged by the social roles his environment has forged for him. It is significant on Jones's part to find some source of inspiration in Brechtian theatre since, to quote Stewart Parker, 'Brecht has bequeathed to us a sense of drama as a potentially dynamic force in society, as a medium political by its very nature, as a forum in which many ideas may thrive and be communicated' (Stewart Parker 1986: 11). Through this experimental play, Jones aims at reshaping the contours of both the Northern Irish identity and the Northern Irish drama about the Troubles.

Throughout *A Night in November* Marie Jones devises new ways to deconstruct the preconceived idea that there are two different communities in Northern Ireland setting the Province apart from Ireland. She resorts to monologue, theatricality and the possibility of creating illusions overtly on stage to

demonstrate that nothing is taken for granted; everything – even one's identity – can be submitted to perpetual movements, to changes. Jones seeks to unite the Irish, including the Northern Irish and, to some extent, the Irish who migrated.⁶ The author tries to help Kenneth, and, through his experience of *estrangement* and *distanciation* those who feel alike redefine his identity, one in which his religious denomination is taken into account but is not the only community marker. Marie Jones eventually gives the reader an insight into what being and feeling Irish means in Northern Ireland. If the notion of "frontiers" applied to religious, social, geographical, political, and historical fields, emerges throughout this play, it is only to be deconstructed. Indeed, other concepts such as love, freedom, free will and above all humanity matter more to the playwright. Theatre enables Jones to reach her aim of redefining a Northern Irish identity. For Parker, "drama falls to the artist to construct a working model of wholeness by means of which this society can begin to hold up its head in the world" in the sense that drama can contain "the conflicts and contradictions, the cruelty and the killings, the implacable hosts, the unending rancor, pettiness and meanness of spirit, the poverty of

imagination and evasion of truth which unites our two communities" (Stewart Parker, 1986: 15). Here we have a perfect matching of Jones's goal and the art of drama itself, since the play relies on parallels and contrasts. To achieve that, all frontiers need to be broken, even those that separate theatrical genres.

This play could serve as a response to Gary Mitchell, another playwright from Northern Ireland who fears the Protestant community is in danger. He worries that there is a "fundamental crisis in Protestant culture. We have been going through an extremely depressing loss of identity, loss of culture and, worst of all, loss of a future" (Pelletier 2008). The state of the community concerns Mitchell as well as it does Jones, but the solution would be to enter in an era in which Northern Irish Protestants embrace an "Irish civic, rather than ethnic, nationalism" (Maguire 2006: 157). The reader may agree with Parker about "the intentions of such a work" being "neither didactic nor absurdist. It will aim to inspire rather than to instruct, to offer ideas and attitudes in a spirit of critical enquiry, as a challenge rather than a riddle, and by means of this, above all, to assert the primacy of the play impulse over the death wish" (Parker 1986: 16). If Jones's play borrows Brechtian techniques, it does not aim at educating the people, a final remark which encourages us to wonder to what extent dramatic techniques and ideologies can be separated in post-modern, post-colonial, post-Brechtian plays.

⁶. Let us mention that the play was largely acclaimed in New York where it was represented: Margaret Llewellyn-Jones notes that it was "winner of the TMA Best Touring Production Award" (2002: 73).

Works Cited

- Brighton, Pam. 2003. "Public Theatre" in *Re-imagining Belfast, a Manifesto for the Arts*. Mark Carruthers & Stephen Douds (eds.). Belfast: Cultural Resolution. 51-56.
- Chambers Lilian, Ger FitzGibbon & Eamonn Jordan. 2001. *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish theatre Practitioners*. Dublin: Carysfort Press. 213-219.
- Gilbert, Helen & Joanne Tompkins. 1996. *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, practice, politics*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, Marie. 2006 (1995). *A Night in November*. London: Nick Hern Books.
- Jordan, Eamonn. 2008. "Kicking with Both Feet?: Marie Jones's *A Night in November*" *The Irish Review. Good Friday Agreement Anniversary*. N° 38, 49-60.
- Lennard, John & Mary Luckhurst. 2002. *The Drama Handbook: a Guide to reading plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Llewellyn-Jones Margaret. 2002. *Contemporary Irish Drama and Cultural Identity*. Bristol: Intellect Books.
- Maguire, Tom. 2006. *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland: Through and beyond the Troubles*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- Maier-Schaeffer, Francine. 2003. *Bertolt Brecht*. Paris: Editions Belin.

- Murray, Christopher. 1997. *Twentieth Century Irish Drama, Mirror up to Nation*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Parker, Stewart. 1986. *Dramatis Personae. A John Malone Memorial Lecture*. Belfast: The Queen's University.
- Pelletier, Martine. 2008. «Marie Jones et Gary Mitchell: deux Belfastois à Londres» *Cycnos* 18.1, 19 Septembre. <http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/document.html?id=1689> (retrieved 29/11/2009)
- Richtarik, Marilyn J.. 2001. (1995). *Acting between the Lines, the Field Day Company and Irish Cultural Politics 1980-1984*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Theatre Development Fund Backstage. «They Will Survive. Review of *Rock Doves*» http://www.tdf.org/TDF_Article.aspx?id=88 (retrieved 29/01/2010)
- Wallace, Clare (ed.). 2006. *Monologues*. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia.
- Whyte, John. 1990. *Interpreting Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Received 16 December 2009

Revised version accepted 3 March 2010

Virginie Privas-Bréauté has been teaching English at Lyon 3 University since 2002. In 2007, she completed a PhD thesis on the religious dimension of the 1969 Northern Irish Troubles as seen through the eyes of Belfast playwrights Stewart Parker and Anne Devlin. Since then she has tackled other subjects of Northern Irish drama such as the language of music in Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* (1989) or the innocence of youth in Owen McCafferty's *Mojo Mickybo* (1998).